

## Frequently Asked Questions about Tutor Professional Development

### Who, ME???

Yes, you. As a tutor you are working with a population of learners that typically did not do well in the “normal” educational environment. These learners will benefit from a different approach, so they need tutors who are open to learning about research-proven techniques. Ultimately, the goal of professional development in the adult education field is to further the gains of the adult learners. Consider yourself an adult, lifelong learner modeling what you expect of your student. Research indicates that “effective professional development is critical for teacher [read tutor] growth and student achievement.” (Lowden, C. (2005). Evaluating the impact of professional development. *The Journal of Research in Professional Learning*.)

### What is professional development (PD)?

From the Bureau of ABLE Policy Guidance: “Professional development includes formal and informal means of assisting practitioners to acquire knowledge, skills, approaches, and dispositions; to explore new or advanced understandings of content, theory, and resources; and to develop new insights into theory and its application to improve the effectiveness of their current practice and lead to professional growth. Examples include peer coaching, independent study and research, workshops, learning from practice, study circles, and conferences.”

### OK, let me ask again, what is PD?

Professional development:

- is something that will increase your learner’s achievements.
- can come in the form of learning about practical instructional strategies.
- can be the acquisition of new knowledge and skills relevant to your tutoring.
- involves learning the theory behind the practice (reasons for why certain things are done).
- involves learning new concepts connected to prior knowledge (sounds like an adult learner characteristic, doesn’t it?).

Professional development should (adapted from Lowden, 2005):

- meet your needs.
- be nonthreatening.
- be offered at a time that is convenient.
- be time well-spent.
- be offered by instructors who are knowledgeable and effective.
- be a positive experience.

### Why is PD important to me?

- “Student learning is directly influenced by teacher [tutor] professional development.” (Lowden, 2005)
- Using new, research-proven teaching techniques can be extremely beneficial to your learner.
- Professional development will increase your skills as a tutor.

### What is an Individual PD Plan?

An individual professional (or personal) development plan is simply a written statement of your goals for the year. For instance, if your learner shows some symptoms of a learning difference you could make a statement such as: “I would like to research learning differences and find out more about teaching techniques that will

work for my learner.” Please keep in mind that each literacy program will have its own procedure for submitting individual professional development plans.

### **Why do I need to have an Individual PD Plan?**

- A written plan will give you a place to start. It will show your intentions and be a reminder of your goals. Your plan can be adapted as needs and interests change and these updates can be added to the original plan.
- Your personal development will be directly reflected in your learner’s progress.

### **How, when, and where can I get PD?**

- Professional development can be obtained in numerous ways. It can be presented by your agency, your Professional Development Center (PDC), Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth (TLC), or other outside agencies. Other means of acquiring PD include (but are not limited to) participation in online courses, independent research, peer support or study groups, mentoring or coaching, peer observation, or discussion with someone knowledgeable in your topic of interest.
- PD can be presented at your agency or another location in or out of your region, on-line, or in a library. (This is NOT an all inclusive list.)
- You can participate in PD at previously scheduled times or at your own convenience.

### **What do I do with the information I get when I participate in PD?**

Professional development should apply to and be used in your tutoring sessions. Once you have experimented with your new knowledge you should take time to reflect on the experience and share your thoughts with peers. You can then assess the effectiveness of the PD and determine your “next steps” towards helping your learner increase his/her skills.

### **How do I put my PD plan into writing?**

- Your program may have a specific format in which they would like your plan to be submitted. If not, you can develop a simple statement or you can expand it to include long and short term goals, a time line, and follow-up plans.
- You may be able to submit your plan to your program via e-mail or in hard copy. It would also be a good idea to keep a file of your plan so that you can continually update it (isn’t that what you do with your learner?).
- Tutors of Literacy can provide outlines for individual professional development plans.

### **How do I decide what my PD goals should be?**

Your goals must be relevant to your tutoring. Some ways that you can determine your goals include:

- identifying a tutoring skill that you would like to strengthen;
- identifying a skill that your learner needs to strengthen;
- researching techniques that would make a positive impact on your student’s learning and achievements;
- determining ways to better engage your learner in the learning process;
- researching ways to improve your learner’s confidence.

### **How do I track my PD activities?**

Your agency may have a particular method in which they would like you to track your activities. You should also keep a personal file with the details of the professional development activities that you do. You will want to note the topic, the date, the amount of time spent on the PD, the location, outcomes of the PD (was it beneficial?), and ideally even a summary of the event.

## **How do I learn from my PD activities?**

In order to fully benefit from the professional development you must apply what you learn to your tutoring, reflect on the information and its application, and share your experiences.

## **How do I share what I learned from my PD activities?**

Some examples include:

- participation in a tutor e-mail discussion list (available through Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth);
- involvement in a tutor group;
- a written summary provided to the program and shared with other tutors;
- a newsletter compiled of tutors' PD experiences.

## **What if the PD in which I participated was not what I expected?**

You will still want to track your participation in the activity and make some notes as to why it wasn't what you expected. This information may be valuable to other tutors.

## **What if I know all of this and still feel that I should not have to participate in PD?**

- Think about the real reason you are tutoring. You want to help your learner increase his/her skills. The best way to do that is to research and learn about the techniques that will work best with your learner. Typical teaching techniques are usually not the most effective way to work with adult learners.
- Remember, you are a model for your learner. By demonstrating your willingness to participate in lifelong learning you will be providing even further support and guidance for your learner.

## **What are teacher competencies and what do they have to do with my PD?**

Pennsylvania has Adult Teacher Competencies and Administrator Competencies. The teacher competencies have been adapted by LitCorps for tutors. These competencies identify numerous areas which tutors should be aware of and address as they tutor. Competencies can be used to guide tutor training and to evaluate tutor performance. They can also be used as a self-assessment tool for tutors. Competencies can be a starting point for creating your individual professional development plan; they can provide a guide for goals, but don't let them be overwhelming.

## **What counts as professional development?**

Examples of PD (this list is NOT comprehensive):

- independent research
- online course
- mentoring or coaching (or being mentored or coached)
- peer observation (or being observed)
- face to face trainings
- peer support/study groups

## **Does my PD need to be something that is tracked in e-Campus?**

No.

## **How much time is required for participation in PD?**

This is a personal decision determined by your needs, goals, and motivation to help your learner.

### **What does reflecting on the PD mean?**

Reflecting means that time is taken after participation in PD to think about the experience and the information that was shared. Take time to think about how the information applies to you and your learner and how you can implement it. Then, take the time to think about how the information affected your tutoring and your learner's skills.

### **How will I determine if the PD was beneficial to me and my learner?**

When setting your goal for PD you should have a desired outcome determined. If participation in PD gets you closer to the desired outcome then it can be considered beneficial. If it did not get you closer to the desired outcome but it did improve another aspect of tutoring it would still be beneficial. If nothing improved after participation in the PD then it most likely was not beneficial. When you take the time to reflect on the PD you will be able to determine whether or not it was beneficial to you and your learner.

### **It's difficult enough to turn in my paperwork. How am I supposed to create and keep track of a professional development plan too?**

Make it part of your monthly paperwork. Set time aside either before or after your tutoring session and discipline yourself to address your goals. Don't expect more of your learners than you are willing to model.

### **How do I contact Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth?**

Visit TLC's website at [www.tlcliteracy.org](http://www.tlcliteracy.org). To request to join the online discussion group, go to: <http://groups.google.com/group/tutoring-programs>. Kim Rossman can be contacted at (814) 867-0203 or [kim@tlcliteracy.org](mailto:kim@tlcliteracy.org). TLC is located at 925 West College Ave, State College, PA 16801.